

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press Release: GCMS Recommendation regarding Flint Municipal Water

The Genesee County Medical Society is updating our recommendations on the use of Flint Municipal water. While filters DO remove lead, solving one problem, they also remove chlorine, a chemical that is normally added to kill germs in drinking water.

Data supports decreasing lead levels in Flint municipal water. When levels were high in the tested samples, filters which were properly maintained did not allow lead levels above the EPA “action level” of 15 ppb. This is the lead level for which a formal response is triggered if more than 10% of homes are measured at or above this number, although all acknowledge that no level of lead is considered “safe”.

It is important to have the water tested to make sure that no lead sediment was dislodged in the pipes leading to a residence. This will remain a concern as we move into warmer weather with its increase in street construction projects, which may disturb the pipes. Bare metal in the pipes or stray metal flakes (lead and other metals), could unexpectedly cause higher levels in water than previously measured in an individual home.

Further, in order for filtered Flint municipal water to be safe, the filter system must be used correctly at all times, with the filter changed as instructed and never left beyond its recommended date of use. The aerators must be flushed according to instructions on a regular basis, as there is the risk of lead particles dislodging from inside the pipes and being caught in the aerators.

It is also very important that consumers of Flint municipal water understand that the filters for lead do not filter out legionella or other microorganisms. Those who are at high risk for legionella and other infections that take advantage of weakened or immature immune systems, including those with the following risk factors, are recommended to continue using only bottled water, which is labeled "purified" (using a “reverse osmosis” process), for drinking, cooking and tooth-brushing:

Risk Factors for Legionella and other Infectious illnesses for Individual Adults and Children (check with your physician if you are uncertain if these apply to you or your family):

- Chronic kidney or liver disease including end-stage organ disease (such as kidney dialysis)
- Diabetes mellitus
- Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive lung disease – COPD, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, severe asthma and other severe lung conditions)
- Solid organ or hematologic malignancy (such as cancer, leukemia, lymphoma, sarcoma)
- Immune system disorders (such as HIV/AIDS, transplant patients on immunosuppressant drugs, long-term steroid use)
- Current or former smokers
- Age > 50 years
- Infants < 1-year-old

IN SUMMARY, THE GENESEE COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY IS MAKING THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- For those people who are most at risk for the negative effects of lead on the brain - children less than 6 years old and pregnant women (for the fetus) – we recommend using bottled water PURIFIED by reverse osmosis.
- Additionally, people who are in the high-risk groups for legionella and other germs that can overwhelm weak immune systems (see above) should continue using only bottled water purified by reverse osmosis for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth. If you have any of the conditions listed, you should continue to follow any other pertinent guidelines from your physician or from the health authorities to reduce your infection risk.
- People who are using filters correctly have had their water tested and shown to be negative for lead, and who are not members of one of the high-risk groups (see list), may use correctly filtered Flint Municipal Water.
- Filter cartridges should be maintained and changed as per the manufacturer's instructions.
- Aerators on any taps used for drinking, cooking or brushing teeth should be checked and cleaned regularly to remove any metal bits that may have been caught.
- The GCMS also reminds our patients to be prepared for unforeseen circumstances. State and federal agencies advise that to prepare for any emergency anywhere, everyone should keep enough water to provide three gallons of water to last three days for each person and pet in the household (i.e. 9 gallons for each person or pet).
- Recent travel with an overnight stay away from home (up to 14 days prior to symptom onset), recent hospital or outpatient (office) healthcare exposure (up to 14 days before symptom onset)
- Exposure to hot tubs (such as whirlpool spas) including either direct use, walking or sitting near a spa.
- Recent repairs or maintenance work on household plumbing

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